A GLIMPSE INTO THE PAST

(A SHORT HISTORY OF THE FIRST 25 YEARS.)

The late 1800's and the turn of the century experienced a great influx of Lithuanians into the United States. The menfolk at that time quickly understood the need of coming together into fraternal organizations. In due time, various societies sprang up in which membership was open to both men and women. Though the women were welcome in these societies, they soon realized that their own particular problems, their desire to know the world about them, their awakening as individuals, could not be answered here. The answer lay in the formation of an all-women's organization. This indeed was the courageous dream of a few forward-looking women.

Early in 1913 destiny brought together two idealistic, contemporary advocates of women's rights, Miss Antanina Jakaitis and Miss Ursula Jokubauskas, who dreamt and talked much on the question of a women's organization. A conclusion was reached, that it would be impractical to attempt to build a foundation for a women's alliance from the then existing societies. Thus, they decided to approach individual women and from that nucleus to evolve a new organization. The work was difficult. They met with skepticism, scoffing, pity, sarcasm and even "fear" from some quarters; fear that these women were agitators, were suffragettes who would stir up the women to abandon the societies that the men had established, thus bringing an end to these societies.

While Antanina Jakaitis and Ursula Jokubauskas were making plans for a women's organization in the New England states, the need for such an organization was foreseen by several people in Pittsburgh, Pa., among them Miss Agnes Sutkaicius and Mr. J. G. Miliauskas. Thus, during the third Federation Congress, June 25-26, 1913, in Pittsburgh, Pa., Agnes Sutkaicius read a referendum regarding this question. She pointed out the need for a women's alliance, and ended by appealing to the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Federation in America to help the women organize such an alliance. Since aid was needed both financially and morally, the Federation would: help in organizing women in the various Lithuanian colonies; would set aside a fund for advertising; in short, would act as guardian of the new organization until such time as the women would be able to govern themselves.

Mr. J. Miliauskas, in a fiery speech, supported the ideas brought forth in the referendum and urged all, especially the clergy, to support the idea and to explain and expound its importance in their respective parishes.

The delegates readily acknowledged the necessity of a women's alliance, but financial aid was another thing. After lengthy discussion it was

denied. A committee was formed, nonetheless, consisting of three people: Miss Agnes Sutkaicius — Chairman; J. Miliauskas and Rev. J. Vaisnoras — Assistants.

It is evident from the letters of Mr. Miliauskas that the work of the committee was difficult and beset with obstacles. The committee was fearful of writing in the press, publicly proclaiming a women's alliance project, and it did not even attempt to prepare a constitution, since it was undecided just what type of organization would be the best — cultural or fraternal. The committee leaned more to the cultural, but following long correspondence with Miss Jokubauskas, agreement was reached. Combining cultural and fraternal needs would give a firmer foundation to the organization. Thus today we have both social and fraternal sections within our chapters.

Early in 1914, the women received vigorous support for their project from the late Rev. F. Kemesis — editor of "Draugas" and "Pažanga". Not only did he give space in the papers he edited, but personally often wrote and spoke at various meetings, advocating the formation of a women's alliance. His sympathy for the cause and constant encouragement, no doubt, helped to sustain the energies — which sometimes may have lagged — of those who first nurtured this idea of the women they inspired to become the first "Sąjungietės".

Living in Worcester, Massachusetts, at this time, Antanina Jakaitis and Ursula Jokubauskas were determined to take the first steps to organize the Women's Alliance. They found sympathetic ears for their cause and soon a small group attempted, in spite of many obstacles, to form the first chapter of this new women's organization. But, life is unpredictable. Ursula Jokubauskas left Worcester to work at "Draugas" in Chicago. Left alone in Worcester, Antanina Jakaitis was beset with adversities — and the venture in the Eastern State failed — but not so the idea!

During the fourth Federation Congress held at Chicago, September 23-25, 1914, Miss Julia Stankevicius read Agnes Sutkaicius' referendum. There was also a referendum by Antanina Jakaitis. It would seem the delegates were convinced of the need of a women's alliance, and without further delay approved the formation of the Women's Alliance. The Congress delegates named a committee to whom it entrusted the job of establishing the Women's Alliance by the end of the year. The committee was comprised of Antanina Jakaitis, Ursula Jokubauskas, Julia Stankevicius from Export, Pa. Miss Jakaitis was named chairman by them.

Since these three lived so far apart, they requested the Congress to name three more women. Added to the committee were: Miss V. Stalilionis from Cicero, Ill., Mrs. V. Skudas from Chicago, Ill., and Mrs. F. Kasetis from Montello, Mass. It was also voted to add Miss A. Sutkaicius to the group.

Following the formation of this committee, its chairman invited the women delegates and guests of the Congress to meet and begin the work of their new venture. Besides the afore-mentioned, the following also attended the first meeting: — delegate Mrs. F. (Macijauskas) Šatas from Chicago, Ill., guests: Miss A. Nausėda from Cicero, Ill., Dr. Susana Šlakis, Miss F. Nutautas, Miss. M. Gurinskas, Mrs. A. Nausėda, Mrs. K. Varanavicius and Mrs. M. Janušauskas, all from Chicago, Illinois.